

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 29 May 2019 – Proof

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

The SPEAKER: I extend a warm welcome to the guests of the member for Hawkesbury, including Julian Leaser, MP, Federal member for Berowra. I also welcome Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells and the Hon. David Clarke, a former member of the other place. I acknowledge Bruce McCarthy, former member for Strathfield, and the Hon. Kevin Rozzoli, AM, former Speaker of this Legislative Assembly. Finally, I welcome councillors from the Hawkesbury City Council and The Hills Shire Council, all guests of the member for Hawkesbury.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON (Hawkesbury) (17:07): Life is a journey of stepping stones that create experiences that craft a person's opinions, beliefs and passions. The road I have travelled has had its challenges and many of those here today have been beside me through good and bad times. I am the girl from Fairfield in Sydney's western suburbs. My father, Colin Reid, died suddenly when I was 17. He died of a heart attack, which was smoking related. My dear mother, Hazel, raised my two brothers and me as a single parent. Nothing was gifted to us, yet I never felt as though I was deprived of anything—except the love and the strong bond I had with my father. His passing has left a wound in my heart that will not heal. Dad was the sort of man who could fit in anywhere and people immediately warmed to him. He could walk into a room of strangers and within minutes he would make everyone feel very much at home. He used to whistle tunes better than anyone I know. Just like me, music gave him so much happiness and he brought happiness when he played his banjo, ukulele, harmonica or accordion.

My journey in life has given me many "life lessons" from which I can draw strength. But I shake my head knowing that something I did 39 years ago—a modelling assignment—has been continually used as a tool to discredit me, and every time I have run for a position in politics those who would like to see me fail have rolled out the story on cue. I asked myself: Why is it that some would seek to shame me whenever I wanted to enter politics? Why weren't they celebrating my accomplishments: a decade on council, two years as deputy mayor, a career spanning the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, small business, almost two decades of volunteering as a proud Liberal, and my greatest achievement—the one of which I am most proud—as mother to my two beautiful children, Kelly and James?

Women bring such a wealth of skills to politics, as they do to many other working environments. Shouldn't we embrace that? Shaming is a cowardly trait that has, at times, manifested itself not just in politics but in the work place, social media and the school playground. It takes a strong and determined female to rise above the mudslinging, to stay focused and determined, and to not listen to the white noise out there. We need to stop defining people by the little things they do. Do not judge people by one moment in their life. Let's encourage authenticity in politics. The bringing together of minds that collectively provides experience from different backgrounds and across the generations has to be good, don't you think? That was the foundation upon which Australia was built.

The opportunity to stand here today was due to a classic *Game of Thrones* episode. However, my journey into politics really started when I met Charlie Lynn, a former member of the Legislative Council. He encouraged me to join the Liberal Party, 19 years ago today, when I was a charity advocate. Is Charlie in the room? I acknowledge Charlie Lynn as well. I immediately related to the Liberal Party's values: freedom of speech, individualism, the right to worship, support of small business, less regulation, lower taxes and giving people a leg-up rather than a handout. Giving back to the community was engrained in me from an early age. As a young child on a Saturday morning I would see my dad welcome neighbours to his garage to repair children's bikes, billy carts and scooters, all for the cost of a smile. Dad had the best-equipped shed in the area—a little bit like *The Castle*. He was a handyman who built our home at Fairfield.

He was a small business man who owned a truck in which he took great pride. He would service the truck, rebuild cars, utes, motorbikes and push bikes all from that garage. Those skills transferred to my brothers when they grew up. My cousins would come to our home to play and at the end of the day, courtesy of dad's hair clippers, they would head back home with a new, very short haircut. There wasn't anything my father would not do for anyone; he always found the time to give back. My mother, who is here today, is the quiet achiever. She is happy to work away in the background without wanting the attention that others seek. She has always had a great affection for her seven sisters and brother. There is nothing she would not do for them. Her loyalty and love for her children, their wives and husbands, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren is beyond compare. Mum, you have been the perfect example to me of how we should treat others. You are my rock and my compass, and I love you dearly.

I am sure my perseverance comes from my mother. Whenever something really challenged my mum she would say, "I won't let it beat me!" She would never give up and always achieved her goals. Sometimes that persisting trait has been at my own peril: I have had to learn the hard way that you can't fix everything in life. You have to walk away when there is nothing left to give. It is nothing to be ashamed of; it is not about being a failure. I see it now as being a life lesson. I am fortunate to be delivering this speech in such an historic week. It is a week when such accomplished leaders of this State have delivered the largest infrastructure project since the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, which took 25 years to complete at a cost of \$820 million.

On Sunday I was delighted to accompany the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian; the Minister for Transport and Roads, Andrew Constance; my fellow councillors and parliamentarians; and also Hawkesbury locals on the first official trip on the Sydney Metro Northwest passenger service. I think there was "metro mayhem" at the time. This project was delivered 10 months ahead of time and \$1 billion under budget. It is on Hawkesbury's doorstep and I think one of the best ways to encourage Hawkesbury locals to include the Sydney Metro Northwest as a preferred means of transport is to make it easy and affordable to access. Commuters are already familiarising themselves with new connective bus links and I am advocating for park-and-ride solutions around Hawkesbury. My vision is to have large car parks built on designated land where commuters will drive to, park their vehicle and catch an express bus straight to the Sydney Metro Northwest, which gives the traveller the choice of catching a train departing every four minutes.

The metro will get more cars off the roads, especially during peak periods, and it reduces toll, fuel and parking expenses, and the headache of sitting in traffic. If we can achieve this it will make moving about on the Hawkesbury road network so much easier, especially for the many trades men and women who live and work in the area. Hawkesbury territory is "tradie territory". That is the number one occupation in Hawkesbury and I can easily relate to this group of workers because both my brothers, Bill and Michael—who are here today—are tradesmen too. It is not just tradespeople who want to get around the electorate in a timely way; it is the working folk who want to get home in time to have dinner with their family and friends, parents and carers taking their children to and from school, and those people travelling across town to medical appointments. Everyone should be able to move about at a reasonable pace.

That is why I was thrilled last year when the Treasurer, the Hon. Dominic Perrottet, announced funding for a business case for a third river crossing at Richmond-North Richmond. That news received more than a round of applause from those who have been subjected to long traffic queues on the Bells Line of Road or Kurrajong Road approaches to the current bridge. On top of that, the Morrison Government has already budgeted \$200 million for this crossing and I know that Sarah Richards, the Liberal candidate for Macquarie, was instrumental in securing this Federal funding. This project is a key link to the small and family businesses that have grown and evolved in Hawkesbury. I want to ensure that the community has input into where this crossing should go. I believe it needs to be well canvassed.

Let us bring the community along with this project so that there is a sense of pride and ownership for this significant piece of infrastructure in Hawkesbury—just as I have seen with the Sydney Metro Northwest and how the community embraced that project as well. Another key piece of infrastructure that I want to see completed is the new Windsor Bridge. This has been a difficult project, thwarted by protestors who pitched a tent on Thompson Square at Windsor in a public space for almost six years. This year's State election result in Hawkesbury delivered a thumping mandate for the Liberal-Nationals Government to continue with the project and, with that result, the protestors pulled down the tent and restored the public space. I am now having conversations with the objector groups to find some consensus.

I respect the fact that they are passionate about protecting the heritage of the area but I am also conscious that Hawkesbury residents have been denied a better option for managing the traffic in that area because of the objections, court hearings and upper House inquiries that have delayed this project. I am excited about the support this Government has bestowed on Hawkesbury, with \$13 million already budgeted by the Treasurer to build a new PCYC to support and mentor our youth. Hawkesbury City Council has identified a suitable site for this much-needed project. We should now get on with the job of providing a safe space where our youth can engage with role models and mentors. It will be a location where our youth can learn the skills to become productive members of our community through participation in sport and group activities that build confidence, self-esteem and values.

Projects such as the Pitt Town bypass are already in progress and I will be diligently ensuring that the work continues. The Pitt Town community has made representations to me on issues that are still outstanding and I want to work towards an outcome that deals with matters from many years ago. In my recent conversations with Hawkesbury City Council, The Hills Shire Council and many residents I am aware that there are some infrastructure issues that are still unresolved. Know that I am determined to have these matters sorted and will be approaching relevant Ministers to see a way forward for parts of the Hawkesbury electorate, including Lower Portland, Mulgrave and Windsor Downs.

I want to touch on a topic that I see is a growing area of need for Hawkesbury, and that is aged care. Like many other electorates, Hawkesbury has an ageing population. Of course, my bias would be to declare that it must be the "youth juice" contained in the beautiful Hawkesbury River that continues to make our locals look like they are drinking from the fountain of youth. That said, there are not enough facilities to care for our seniors. Locals are telling me that they want to remain at home as long as they possibly can. They want to lead an independent life and they want to be given choices on how they care for their loved ones. Respite is an important consideration as well as understanding the real health challenges with dementia, heart disease, cancer and Parkinson's disease. Considering a centre for excellence in dementia and aged care is something I would like to escalate in conversation. But we cannot stop there.

Mental illness is an ever-present reality. I would like the Hawkesbury population, especially the youth of our electorate, to have better access to mental health services. I do not want Hawkesbury residents to feel isolated because they cannot access proper care and treatment. Mental illness is often a silent illness. Clinical depression, anxiety, autism, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder are more frequent diagnoses now in our society. How well we deal with these conditions remains a challenge. I am keen to look at ways to improve the support and care of Hawkesbury people because these are the people whom I am to advocate on behalf of, just as I have advocated for those residents who belong to The Hills Shire Council local government area. I am proud of my track record as a local councillor with The Hills Shire Council. This third tier of government is a real grassroots connection and I get great satisfaction in finding solutions to people's problems. I have learned that very small issues can escalate a resident's fears and anxiety unless the problem is fixed for them. I saw that as my primary role on council and it has been so rewarding to see the results.

Many of the friends I have met over these years are here today in this Chamber—it is wonderful to see a very busy Chamber. Thank you for coming. I want to acknowledge especially the two mayors whom I served under as Deputy Mayor of The Hills Shire Council. To Mayor Michelle Byrne, who gave me her apologies very late today because she is not well, and former Mayor Yvonne Keane: Thank you both for encouraging me to shine. To my fellow councillors and general manager: You have supported me in so many ways and I have been proud to work with such a stellar team for the leading council in New South Wales. I look forward to working with you until the end of the current term.

Today is a special occasion because I am honoured to be in the room with several members for Hawkesbury. First, there is me as the new member for Hawkesbury—and that is such an honour. Then the Hon. Dominic Perrottet, who was a former member for Hawkesbury. Ray Williams, the member for Castle Hill, was also a former member for Hawkesbury. Kevin Rozzoli, AM, was a former member for Hawkesbury. I acknowledge Kevin, who is here tonight. I can assure the House that the recent mention in this Chamber of his passing was greatly exaggerated and I am sure that Kevin would be pleased to have the record corrected. It is wonderful to have you join me today, Kevin. Thank you so much.

I want to take a moment to speak of my two children, Kelly and James. You have both made me proud. I love that you care for each other and contribute to my happiness in so many ways. Your tenacity, determination, sense of humour and appreciation of the Australian way gives me a deep satisfaction. Kelly, thank you for your insightfulness and love. I am your greatest fan forever. Know that I will love you dearly always. James, your caring and protective nature has been so reassuring for me. I am blessed to have you as my son. Wyvern, thank you for the respect, love and patience you show me. You are always there for me and I know that you care. I thank the people of Hawkesbury for placing their trust in me. My first responsibility will always be to them. To the Treasurer of New South Wales, Dominic Perrottet: I have watched you grow from a young man just entering politics to a talent well beyond your years. This Government is well served by you. Thank you for this opportunity.

I also thank Damien Tudehope, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Tanya Davies, Greg Smith, Anthony Roberts, David Clarke, Kevin Conolly, Teena McQueen, Aileen MacDonald, Charles Perrottet, Dallas McInerney—the list goes on. I also acknowledge David Elliott and Mark Taylor, and Julian Leeser and Alan Cadman in the gallery. I have drawn great strength also from women within the Liberal Party. I make particular mention of a few very special women who have been beside me for the whole journey. To Liberal Women's Council President, Mary-Lou Jarvis, and Liberal Women's Council Past President Chantelle Fornari-Orsmond: Thank you for your unwavering support. Your advice, resilience, loyalty and friendship will always be with me. You are both very talented women. Your time will come.

To Ann Youl: You were always there to console me after every preselection loss—and there were more than a dozen; I have had 18 preselections in my time. Ann, you are the quintessential loyal Liberal. Thank you for being here today. To Natalie Ward: Your guidance as I have entered Parliament has been most appreciated. I thank you for the time you give me. I thank the Liberal Party and, in particular, the Hawkesbury State Electorate Conference, and my friends and supporters. Many of you have travelled great distances to share this evening with me and I thank you. A special mention goes to Jill Reardon and John and Margaret Berenschot for their fantastic effort in the campaign. Thank you so much. To my campaign team—Rick Alloggia, Patrick Conolly, former member for Strathfield Bruce "Mac" MacCarthy, Sean Fannin and my wingman and campaign manager Brooke Collins, OAM—thank you for an outstanding effort.

To Paul Osborne: Thank you for travelling on this bumpy road with me. Today is a day of celebration, but know that I still carry the sorrow in my heart for your boy Noah, just as I pine for my nephew Colin, whose life was cut short. I give special mention to Peter Higgins, Tony Jeffcott, James Butler, Ross Colosimo, Kenthurst Rotary, Friends of Glenhaven, Mick Mathers and Lester Vincent. I thank my electorate office team—Adam, Marko, Laura, Mark and Nathan and my colleague David Rossi. Now the next chapter begins. I conclude with a short quote from Winston Churchill—you have to throw in a quote every now and again. He said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." Thank you.

Members stood in their places and applauded.

The SPEAKER: I also congratulate the member for Hawkesbury.